

CHAPTER XXIV: JULIUS KAHN PUBLIC PLAYGROUND

Nearly fifty years after Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield wrote that the Presidio's neighbors were welcome to enjoy the natural beauties of the reservation, a portion of the post officially became a public playground for children. Two of San Francisco's citizens played important roles in this achievement, Rosalie M. Stern and Congressman Julius Kahn. Playground Commissioner Stern, long active in recreational planning, coordinated local efforts while Congressman Kahn worked with the War Department in Washington, D.C. On July 24, 1922, the Presidio's commander, Brig. Gen. Chase W. Kennedy, issued a revocable license to the City and County of San Francisco granting a ninety-nine year lease on a tract of land, 500 feet by 525 feet, on the Presidio's south boundary between the city's Locust and Spruce streets.¹

In the early twentieth century playgrounds for urban children were viewed as essential for their development and good health. This particular site in a hitherto unused part of the reservation, was a welcome addition to the small Pacific Heights playground five blocks away. Years later a newspaper called it "the last playground in the Western Hemisphere where leisure and gentleness really count, where kids play rather than compete, and where the biggest problem is an occasional fight between pedigreed dogs."²

Boundary modifications over the years resulted in the north-south dimension being reduced to 400 feet because of the steep land in the north, and an extension in the level land to the east, making that dimension 656 feet, giving the area 7.3 acres. Two unimproved roads in the playground lead into the Presidio, one on the north, the other on the east.

A recently constructed field house, replacing an older one and located approximately in the middle of the area, houses the administrative facilities and two restrooms. Sanded kiddies play areas are located nearby. To the west, activities include two double tennis courts and an outdoor basketball court. The level land in

1. This description of the playground owes a great debt to Lauren Weiss Bricker's National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the playground (1990). Mrs. Stern was also responsible for the establishment of the Sigmund Stern Recreation Grove in San Francisco. The playground was named in honor of Congressman Kahn in 1926.

2. *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, March 4, 1973.

the eastern extension contains a large playing field for football, soccer, and baseball (Little League). A portion of the playground has a grove of Monterey cypress and acacia trees. Early plans showed a putting green and a bridle path but neither is extant. The playground also provided camping for Scouts. In the 1950s the Army developed its athletic fields adjacent to the playground, to the north.

For nearly seventy years the Julius Kahn Playground has well served generations of children in the Pacific Heights and other neighborhoods.³

3. The National Park Service did not discuss the playground in its *Creating a Park* (1994). Also see U.S. Army, *Final Environmental Impact Statement*, p. 3-74.